一条旧腰带的扶车法

外孙女五岁半就嚷着要学车，她同学都会骑了。她外公那年六十八，膝盖不好，可他说，我带。学车的事就这么定了，我妈不放心，跟在后头背了个包，里头全是她买的护具。

护具是我妈挑的，超市里成套卖的，头盔、护膝、护肘都有。头盔戴上外孙女就不肯摘，吃饭也戴着，我妈硬是让她戴着睡了个午觉，说戴习惯了才肯一直戴。护膝挑大了一号，我妈说孩子长得快，能套两年。后来才知道超市那套护具软塌塌的，真摔只能防擦伤，防不了磕碰。

车是外公改的。他把我小时候那辆小轮车从杂物间翻出来，换了新轮胎，车座拆下来又装低了三指，脚蹬子换成带防滑钉的。他干活那天蹲在杂物间门口，扳手在膝盖上垫了块布，蹲一会儿起来歇一会儿。

学车在河坝底下的空地上，就是老一辈人学车都在的那种地方。外公的扶车法是老法子：一条旧腰带，从他腋下穿过外孙女后背，两手各攥一头。他说这法子他师父传他的，孩子往前栽他往前带，往后仰他往后拽，比抓手稳，也不伤胳膊。

外孙女头两天光哭。车把一歪就哭，哭完接着蹬。我妈在后头心疼，几次要上前，被外公瞪回去了。外公不喊小心，也不喊别怕，他就一遍一遍说，腰杆挺直，眼睛看前头，你比昨天强。五岁半的孩子，听得出昨天和今天不一样。

跑到第三天傍晚，外公攥着腰带跑不动了，在原地喘。他喊我，你来拽。我把腰带接过来，拽出去十几步，回头一看，外公坐在空地的石墩上，冲我摆手。我这才发现手里轻了——腰带早从她身上滑下去了，她自己骑出去了。

外孙女学会那天，外公兑现了奖励：驮她回了一趟家，她坐前筐，他蹬车，一路人夸这外公厉害。他六十八的膝盖，回家上楼歇了二十分钟。我妈一边骂一边给他揉腿，他嘿嘿笑，说，我小时候学车，我师父连腰带都没有。

那辆小轮车后来让外孙女骑到了八岁，轮胎又换过一回。外公七十三岁那年走了，扳手和那条旧腰带都在杂物间，我妈没扔。

如今外孙女上初中，骑一辆变速车，护具戴得比谁都齐——头盔、护膝、护肘，一样不落，这是她姥姥立的规矩。她不知道那条腰带，也不知道超市那套软塌塌的护具当年是怎么挑的。她只知道她外公教她骑车那天，说的是：你比昨天强。

我后来也陪我自己的孩子学车，用的是新式的扶法，买的是有认证标志的护具，一样一样都讲究。可我心里最稳的一次，还是那条旧腰带攥在手里的分量。孩子往前栽，往前带；往后仰，往后拽。这话搁在带孩子这件事上，好像样样都用得着。

The Old Belt as a Holding Method

Our granddaughter started clamoring for bicycle lessons at five and a half; all her classmates could already ride. Her grandfather was sixty-eight that year and had bad knees, but he said: I will take her. And so it was settled. My mother worried and

trailed behind with a backpack stuffed entirely with protectors she had bought.

The protectors were chosen by my mother: a supermarket set with helmet, knee pads, and elbow pads. Once the helmet went on, our granddaughter refused to take it off; she wore it to meals, and my mother finally let her take her afternoon nap wearing it, saying a habit formed early lasts. The knee pads were bought one size large — my mother said children grow fast and they would fit for two years. Only later did we learn that the supermarket set was flimsy: it could stop scrapes in a fall, but not impacts.

The bicycle was rebuilt by Grandfather. He dug out the small-wheeled bicycle I had ridden as a child from the storage room, fitted new tires, lowered the seat another three fingers, and swapped the pedals for ones with anti-slip studs. That day he worked squatting at the storage-room door, a wrench resting on a cloth pad over his knee, squatting a while, standing to rest a while.

We learned on the open ground under the river embankment, the kind of place where the older generation all learned. The holding method of Grandfather was the old method: an old belt passed under the armpits of the child across her back, one end gripped in each of his hands. He said his own master had passed it to him: if the child pitches forward, guide forward; if she leans back, pull back; steadier than grabbing an arm, and it does not hurt the shoulder.

For the first two days our granddaughter only cried. The handlebar tipped and she cried, and after crying she kept pedaling. My mother ached to see it and started forward several times; Grandfather glared her back. He never shouted be careful and never shouted do not be afraid. He only said, over and over: back straight, eyes ahead, you are better than yesterday. A child of five and a half can hear the difference between yesterday and today.

On the evening of the third day, Grandfather, gripping the belt, could run no farther and stood gasping. He called me: your turn to hold. I took the belt and pulled along for a dozen steps; when I looked back, Grandfather was sitting on a stone block in the open ground, waving at me. Only then did I feel my hand had gone light — the belt had long slipped off her, and she was riding by herself.

On the day she learned, Grandfather delivered the promised reward: he rode her home, she in the front basket, he pedaling, and the whole way people praised this grandfather. With his sixty-eight-year-old knees, he rested twenty minutes after climbing the stairs home. My mother scolded him while rubbing his legs, and he chuckled: when I learned to ride, my master did not even have a belt.

The small-wheeled bicycle was ridden by our granddaughter until she was eight; its tires were changed once more. Grandfather died at seventy-three; the wrench and

the old belt are still in the storage room, and my mother never threw them out.

Our granddaughter is now in middle school, riding a geared bicycle, wearing her protectors more completely than anyone — helmet, knee pads, elbow pads, not one missing, a rule set by her grandmother. She does not know about the old belt, nor how the flimsy supermarket set was once chosen. She only knows that on the day her grandfather taught her to ride, what he said was: you are better than yesterday.

Later I accompanied my own child learning to ride, using the modern holding method, buying certified protectors, everything proper. But the steadiest moment in my heart is still the weight of that old belt in the hand. If the child pitches forward, guide forward; if she leans back, pull back. Spoken of raising children, it seems to fit everything.